

Message Text

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14

ACTION ARA-17

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: EAID, ELAB, PN

SUBJ: REPLACEMENT FOR AIFLD DIRECTOR HEBERLE

SUMMARY. EMBASSY/ USAID SUGGEST THAT AID/ AWASHINGTON AND AIFLD/ WASHINGTON REVIEW NOMINATION OF CLEMENTE HERNANDEZ TO REPLACE HEBERLE AS AIFLD CPD PANAMA IN VIEW OF AIFLD PRECARIOUS POSITION IN PANAMA AND GROWING PANAMANIAN- CUBAN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON BASIS OF BIO DATA AND BRIEF INTERVIEWS EMBASSY/ USAID CONCLUDES THAT CLEMENTE HERNANDEZ IS WELL QUALIFIED TO REPLACE HEBERLE AS CPD HERE. WE WOULD ENJOY WORKING WITH HIM.

2. YET, AS DEPT. AWARE, AIFLD PROGRAM IN PANAMA HAS BEEN SKATING ON THIN LEGAL ICE SINCE NEW CONSTITUTION PASSED LAST OCTOBER. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE INDICATIONS THAT FINAL DECISION ON AIFLD STATUS NOT RPT NOT DECIDED BY GOVT. UST IN LAST WEEK LABOR MINISTRY BEGAN CIRCULATING DRAFT BILL TO CREATE ITS OWN LABOR EDUCATION INSTITUTE WHICH MIGHT BE INTENDED TO SERVE AS COMPETITION TO AIFLD OR, VIEWED MOST PESSIMISTICALLY, REPLACE IT.

3. AIFLD/ PANAMA IS IN PRECARIOUS POSITION AND THE FACT THAT HERNANDEZ IS A CUBAN EXILE WITH ANTI- CASTRO EXPERIENCE WILL OPEN PROGRAM UP TO ATTACK ON ANOTHER ISSUE. PANAMANIAN NATIONALISTS OF COURSE ALREADY ATTACK AIFLD AS " TOOL OF IMPERIALISM" FOR ITS WORK WITH DECMOCRATIC UNIONS BUT DURING THIS PERIOD OF GROWING CUBAN- PANAMANIAN FRIENDSHIP, WHICH IS VERY LIKELY TO CULMINATE

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IN OPEN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, IN THE NOT- TOO- DISTANT FUTURE, HERNANDEZ WILL PERSONALLY BECOME FOCUS FOR CRITICISM OF LEFT THAT WILL AFFECT AIFLD PROGRAM AND DEMOCRATIC UNION MOVEMENT.

4. WE RECOGNIZE THAT HERNANDEZ ' S EXPERIENCE AND HIS LATIN BACKGROUND WILL HELP HIM MAKE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION OFFSETTING SOME OF NEGATIVE EFFECTS OUTLINED ABOVE. NONETHELESS, CURRENT THREATS TO AIFLD' S PROGRAM ARE REAL AND ARE APT TO BECOME MORE SERIOUS IF HERNANDEZ' S CUBAN ASSOCIATIONS ARE MADE SUBJECT OF LOCAL PUBLIC DEBATE. EMBASSY/ USAID WOULD PREFER TO HOLD OFF GIVING COUNTRY CLEARANCE UNTIL WE HAVE RECEIVED ASSURANCES THAT AID/ WASHINGTON AND AIFLD/ WASHINGTON HAVE REVIEWED POSSIBLE RISKS. IF DECISION IS TO GO AHEAD WITH NOMINATION WE URGE THAT HERNANDEZ VISIT PANAMA FOR PERIOD LONG ENOUGH SO THAT HE MEET WITH LABOR MINISTER AND WE CAN GET IDEA OF MINISTER' S PROBABLE REACTION.
SAYRE

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